

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB 487 -- MARCH 29, 2022

My name is Dr. Janice Gruendel. I have proudly lived and worked in Connecticut since arriving here in 1975 to attend graduate school at Yale in developmental psychology. Our own Ed Zigler, the father of Head Start, was my advisor and constant academic provocateur. Ed told me, again and again, that if you want to know the priorities of a state or nation, "Follow the dollars, Janice." Of course, he was right.

Connecticut has finally found the opportunity to place resources in an industry essential to the well-being of young children and their families. By enabling parents to be employed, this same industry protects and extends the economic capacity of our communities, businesses, and the state. Senate Bill 487 would do just that by creating a dedicated line of dollars for Connecticut's infant and toddler childcare sector. This sector has long been underfunded and, one might say, even abused by our investment priorities. Follow the dollars...

There are many sound reasons to do this, especially as Covid has so graphically revealed the fault lines in this vital sector. I leave these economic and workforce arguments to others speaking in support of this bill.

I support this bill based on data that we have collected in Bridgeport revealing how very many of our youngest children are not consistently hitting developmental milestones at the age of three years.

It should stop you in your tracks to learn that between half and three-quarters of our youngest children are not "on target" at the age of three. We have data from 2014, 2017 and 2021 so we know that this is not a statistical fluke. Most recently, Medicaid data documents that many of these children are not even being identified as needing extra help and support. I hate the words "behind at three," but that is where we find ourselves.

What does this have to do with the state's paltry investment in childcare for infants and toddlers, and why should we fix it? It's simple: The on-target development of these children must be a partnership between parents and the childcare sector – both supported in their vital roles of nurturing the growth of all of our babies.

For many of our children, across economic and racial divides, the women (and sometimes men) who provide childcare for our infants and toddlers **are their second parents**. They care for, protect, and nurture these young children so their own parents can go to work, thus contributing to the economic capacity of our state and, of course, of their own families.

As second parents, our childcare workers are responsible for the development and well-being of thousands of little children during these earliest critical years. This is not a babysitter service or a place to drop off a child for an hour or two. Rather, young children are with them for six to ten hour a day, or longer.

Yet through a terribly complicated system of inadequate funding, we support this industry just barely enough to keep its doors open -- while many childcare providers earn only a poverty wage themselves. On top of that, there are nowhere near enough childcare providers and slots for this state's babies and toddlers so parents can go to work or school themselves.

Earlier federal Covid funding, aptly managed by the CT Office of Early Childhood, has kept this industry barely afloat. It is now time for the State of Connecticut to use the resources it has and support a proper, effective system of childcare for infant and toddlers. We place great responsibility on these individuals to be the second parents for our babies.... They cannot do this without our investment.

I still hear Ed Zigler gnarling in my ear.... Follow the dollars.

Respectfully submitted, Janice M. Gruendel (jmruendel@yahoo.com)
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